

Original Paper

Writing Humanity in Yemi's Fragrant Hearth Mountain

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Abstract

Among the writers in Suzhou, Ye Mi is a writer with distinctive creative personality that cannot be ignored. Based on the detailed reading of the novel "Fragrant Furnace Mountain", this paper combines the relevant materials for a comprehensive analysis, starting from the three aspects of describing the picture of human nature, the narrative strategy of human nature writing, and the internal causes of human nature, to observe the disclosure of human nature and the warmth of the novel, and to show the beautiful literary desire of Ye Mi to repair the defective spiritual home.

Keywords

Ye Mi, Fragrant Hearth Mountain, human nature writing

1. Introduction

Literary works in Suzhou are like a hundred flowers competing for attention, giving birth to Lu Wenfu and Fan Xiaoqing, as well as many new and old writers such as Zhu Wenying, Jing Ge, Ye Mi and Dai Lai. Ye Mi, as a rising star in Suzhou's writers' group, has been active in recent years and has received widespread attention. With her outstanding literary talent, profound writing skills and rich life experience, Ye Mi has created a series of novels depicting the human heart and human nature. "It is the mission of literature to present the psychology, consciousness and subconsciousness of human beings, and to reveal the inner dynamics and mechanisms of human activities as well as the social and life dimensions related to human beings" (He & Zhang, 2021). Yemi uses her meticulous writing style to show the uneasiness and anxiety of people in modern society. The study of literary geography is becoming more and more popular, and the study of human nature in *Fragrant Hearth Mountain* is, on the one hand, an enrichment of the study of Yemi's novels, and on the other hand, it also provides support for the study of Suzhou's writers' group and Suzhou's culture.

2. The Presentation of the Human Picture in *Fragrant Furnace Mountain*

Ye Mi won the Sixth Lu Xun Literature Short Story Prize with her less than 10,000-word novel *"Fragrant Furnace Mountain"*, which is the highest literary honor won by another female writer in Suzhou after Fan Xiaoqing, the winner of the Fourth Lu Prize. Fan Xiaoqing once said in an interview with a reporter after winning the award that no matter how the times develop, writing about people and human nature can never be wrong. The same is true for Ye Mi.

In the current context of rapid urbanization, everyone has become a "perpetual motion machine" focusing on efficiency and effectiveness in the economic tide, and people are no longer fixated on the reality of "survival" and "injustice" at their own level, but rather on the reality of "survival" and "injustice" at their own level. Instead of focusing on the realities of "survival" and "injustice" at their own level, people shift them to the "other" in order to realize reconciliation with reality. As a result, the relationship between human beings is increasingly exposed as problematic: indifference, mistrust, and even wanton harm with malice in one's heart. With her sharp sensibility and insight, Yemi lifts the veil of warmth that covers the surface of life for us, highlights the sad and happy lives of minor characters in the ordinary life, examines the essence of human nature under the bright appearance of these characters, and realizes why the human nature is getting more and more mutilated, and in this way, she looks at our current lives. Her words try to reject those negative energies that are eating away at the human heart, and aspire to mend those damaged hearts and human nature.

2.1 Disclosure of Human Nature under Urban-rural Heterogeneity

After the reform and opening-up, China's economic development has achieved a leaping growth, and the accompanying urbanization process has been accelerating. Urbanization, on the one hand, is the transfer of agricultural population to cities and towns, and on the other hand, is the diffusion and extension of urban civilization and modern civilization to the countryside. However, whether in the cities or in the countryside, the ever-increasing materialistic desire fills people's minds, and they chase each other for their own interests. The pursuit of money and the desire for material things have become the goal of many people, yet the progress of society is at the cost of the regression of human nature. While acquiring all kinds of material enjoyment, people gradually expose the dark side of human nature.

In *"Fragrant Hearth Mountain"*, a murder case happened in the town of Flower Dock is introduced at the beginning of the book. Because of the murder case, the main character "I" has not made any new friends in the past six months. This accidental murder case is like a sharp dagger, deeply piercing the heart of the protagonist, leaving an unhealable trauma in "I"'s subconscious, and the psychological factors such as vigilance, fear, and suspicion have seriously affected "I"'s interpersonal interactions, and made "I" no longer have any interpersonal relationships. I no longer trust strangers, and even full of hostility to them, the self stuck in a lonely and cowardly predicament can not break free. If the murder case is to make the protagonist "I" have the fear of life safety, then the town villagers' gossip is

the last straw that breaks the “I”. “And everyone in town said she deserved it. The townspeople said she deserved it. Living together without being married and leading wolves into the house, this is not deserved is what? Although I am strong and bold, but since this incident, I have been careful with my words and behavior, do not dare to walk alone at night, and do not dare to make friends. So as not to be scolded on a deserved” (Ye, 2014), in today’s society, pre-marital cohabitation to become a common phenomenon, the modern concept of marriage with urbanization and the expansion of modern civilization into the countryside, the collision of the new concepts and the old concepts of human nature will inevitably be exposed to the collision of the conservative and cowardly side, so the face of a living life passed, the bystanders should be exposed to the feelings of regret, sympathy, not seen! Therefore, in the face of the loss of a living life, the bystanders should show regret and sympathy without seeing the slightest bit of it, but with a kind of victim’s guilt theory of “innocent” tone to say the word “deserved”, which is how cold, selfish and ignorant. Through the word “deserved”, Ye Mi exposes the darkness and ugliness of the depths of human nature, which is the most primitive and real part of human nature that cannot be ignored, avoided or idealized by the creator.

It is undeniable that the speed of urban development is rapidly spreading to the remote countryside, which is also gradually changing the original innocent humanity of the rural people. On the way to Fragrant Furnace Mountain in the middle of the night, “I” was lost in the village houses, and these secluded roads felt so strange and intimidating. The villagers are indifferent to strangers, especially the middle-aged woman who opens the door and turns me away because of a hundred dollars, which makes me ask: “Is the basis of trust just a cell phone or a hundred dollars?” (Ye, 2014)

The wave of development of the times rolls in with mud and dirt, flooding the cities and affecting the countryside. Anxiety, lack of trust, indifference and selfishness, and profit-seeking have become a part of our daily lives without a sound. Through his words, Yemi narrates a series of problems exposed by the heterogeneity of human nature during the rapid development of urban and rural areas in the new era, expecting to arouse people’s attention and reflection.

2.2 Warm Humanity in a Complex Environment

“She does not speak out for the victims and perpetrators in history, nor does she clean up history; she does not draw lines between what is right and what is wrong, nor does she judge what is right and what is wrong. Yemi writes earthly stories with a cold brush, but this coldness is full of imperceptible ‘compassion’, thirst and desire for the depths of human nature, and trust and companionship for people. It is not necessary to be a ‘good person’, just the most basic earthly warmth” (Yang & Fan, 2017). Yemi writes about the darkness of human nature, showing the trauma of the individual’s inner heart caused by the external society, not a critique of the evil of human nature, “She does not confront radical modernization with sharp criticism, but rather pours out her love with warm-hearted writing” (He, 2015). The purpose of her writing is not to portray the perfect and flawless good person, but to show the world as an ordinary member, a person who is closest to the reality. The purpose of her writing is

not to portray a perfect good person, but to show the complexity and multi-faceted human nature as an ordinary member of the world, a small character closest to reality.

In novel writing, character is always the key to attract readers, and this is especially true for delicate and small short stories. In *"Fragrant Hearth Mountain"*, Ye Mi's selection and positioning of several core characters are obviously well thought out. If "I" is regarded as a symbol of the city dwellers, then Su, a strange young man, is undoubtedly the best representative of the rural dwellers. He is simple, generous, helpful, and witty, which is in stark contrast to the indifference and materialism of the city dwellers in general. The villagers I met when I got lost in the villages are very different from the image passed down by my ancestors and fathers, and they are more or less tainted with the indifference of the city people, which is in sharp contrast to Su. Before meeting Su, "I" had been immersed in the hustle and bustle of city life. As a university teacher, "I" was still able to escape from the glamor of city life and get a short break, but I had never really experienced the freedom of the spirit and the warmth of constant love. However, I have never really experienced the freedom of spirit and the constant warmth of love. After meeting the passionate Su, his sincerity and trust let him feel the warmth of love. However, "I" was wary of strangers, which made "I" feel deep fear and disgust. Su's words of "parallel gourd", "husband and wife tree", "two-color magnolia flower", "betting" when enjoying the night view, and the love song "one key, one lock, brother is the key, sister is the key..." have become a burden that "I" can't get rid of in my heart. I can't get rid of the burden and annoyance in my heart. As a strange young man who has known "me" for a long time, Su did not care about "me" hostility towards him. After the night trip to Fragrant Furnace Mountain, he finally succeeded in opening the door of "I" that had been closed for a long time. As a rescuer, Su heals the trauma in my heart and changes my perception of modern villagers' prejudice in the dialogues and interactions. Su's appearance is the highlight of the novel, making "I" realize that even in today's society, where indifference between people is soaring, there are still people who retain the good side of humanity.

3. The Narrative Strategy of Human Nature Writing in Fragrant Hearth Mountain

Novel as a narrative art, writers should grasp the overall narrative structure of the layout, shaping personal unique, concise, condensed narrative language, with different narrative perspective to bring readers a different reading experience, it can be said that this is an indispensable part of each writer's creative process of thinking, especially for short stories. Short story writers need writers to take a different approach from the way of narrative, thus reflecting the artistic charm of its short and alert. In *Fragrant Hearth Mountain*, Ye Mi adopts the first-person internal perspective narrative, allowing readers to follow "my" line of sight and realize the humanity of what "I" see, so that readers can immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the story, the plot of the rendering and portrayal of the story; at the same time, Ye Mi starts from the mundane daily life by describing the protagonist's life, and the story of the protagonist's life, and the story of the protagonist's life. At the same time, Yemi starts from

the mundane daily life, and through the description of the main character “I”, who goes to the Fragrant Furnace Mountain to enjoy the moonlight after a rainy day, he elaborates a unique encounter between a man and a woman, caring for the reality in the depiction of daily life, and scrutinizing and capturing the darkness and beauty of the human nature.

3.1 First Person inside Perspective Narrative

In *Narrative Discourse* New Narrative Discourse, Genette states, “First-person narrative is the result of conscious aesthetic choices, not the mark of a straightforward, heartfelt autobiography” (Gérard, 1990). The so-called internal perspective means that when the focus of the narrative coincides with a certain character, the protagonist becomes the center of all senses, which includes the fictional “subject” of senses who sees him as an aesthetic object, and through the narrative we can fully understand the character’s feelings and thoughts. When we delve into the internal perspective of *Fragrant Hearth Mountain*, it means that the narrative is always obsessed with what “I” experienced and felt during the trip. I seem to be a frame from which all external events are filtered into the narrative.

As the subject of the experience, the novel begins by describing how “I” became fearful and wary of unfamiliar environments and strangers because I heard about a murder in town, in which the victim, also an unmarried woman, was killed by her live-in boyfriend “for no reason”. The fact that I have not made any new friends in the past six months naturally sets a tense, uneasy, and slightly agitated emotional tone for the entire essay. The first-person internal perspective of the narrative allows the reader to follow “my” nervousness into the incense burner mountain exploration trip, followed by a section of the environment to describe the inner sense of relaxation, but the sudden appearance of a strange young man Su reminds “me” of the murder case, once again raise the vigilance; but unfortunately, “I” did not make any new friends for nearly six months, naturally set the tone of the entire article, nervous and slightly agitated. I am again on the alert; But unfortunately, “I” lost my way in the intricate village roads, late at night, alone, women, the superposition of these dangerous factors, so that the tension, fear, anxiety again increased, and the face of the cold, suspicious, unwilling to lead the way to the villagers, “I” cannot help but sincerely issued a “The basis of trust is only a cell phone or a hundred dollars?” The question makes the reader feel the anger and helplessness of “I” at the moment.

In the novel, a large portion of the text describes the episode of “I” getting lost in the village, and through the detail that the middle-aged woman refuses to lead the way because “I” can’t offer any return for the time being, it keenly demonstrates that the indifferent human feelings of “profit-oriented” are spreading silently and like a virus in the originally clear and bright rural villages. The social trend of silent spreading in the originally clear countryside, the thicker and thicker barriers erected between people also indicate the change of human nature, and the incomplete human nature of modern society is nakedly thrown on the stage for readers to see in this process. But writing about the darkness of human nature is not the purpose of Ye Mi’s novel. In the process of interaction with Su, “I” feel Su’s simplicity,

warm-heartedness and friendliness, and get to know the kind-hearted Granny Xia and the optimistic and selfless Sister Yan, whose pure and beautiful humanity contrasts sharply with that of several villagers in the village, including the middle-aged woman. Their pure and beautiful humanity contrasts sharply with that of a few villagers in the village, including the middle-aged woman, making “I” see clearly that the disability of human nature has not plunged the society into darkness, and that truth, goodness and beauty still exist.

Through the first-person internal perspective narrative, the distance between the reader and the author has been narrowed. With “my” experience, Yemi exposes the cripples of human nature in this era to the public, but it still cannot cover up the truth, goodness, and beauty behind the cripples, and I believe that this era is still a time imbued with mutual trust, mutual assistance, and mutual love, which may be Yemi’s true purpose in writing about human nature. This may be the true purpose of Ye Mi’s humanistic writing.

3.2 *Secular Narratives of Daily Life*

“Daily life narrative refers to the inclusion of the basic necessities of daily life such as eating, drinking, food, clothing, housing, transportation, male and female love and so on into literary works, taking the basic daily life state of human beings as the center of its narrative expression and using this as a basis for gauging the inner spirit of the characters and the essence of life” (Agnes, 1990). Everyday narratives are closely related to everyone’s daily life, permeating people’s lives in some form or another all the time, and the small things in daily life also contain profound life and social problems. Therefore, everyday narratives have become the objects of choice for writers to create.

Yemi is good at showing the darkness and goodness of human nature through stories in daily life. Her works are not oriented to grand themes, but rather explore the psychological and spiritual world of people in trivial reality. Ye Mi is like an ascetic monk who concentrates on her spiritual practice. She chooses a quiet urban-rural border zone in the hustle and bustle of Wuguo City to meditate, and carefully caring for flowers and plants and raising small animals are the norms of her daily life. “Suzhou writers focus on the subtle details in the crevices of time, sacrificing public space for private space, capturing the daily state and human presentation of the little people” (Qi, 2019), and the interactions with the ordinary working masses in their daily lives provide writers with a perspective on the living conditions of the underclass. The triviality and fullness of real life, as well as the diversity and authenticity of life and life experiences, provide her with the possibility of drawing inspiration from the real world. A flash of inspiration may come at the moment of mopping the floor or choosing vegetables, or watering the flowers and vegetable patch. Yemi’s short stories often feature tiny events and insignificant characters in life, because they are the real power that touches the author’s heart.

“*Fragrant Hearth Mountain*” tells the story of a one-night trip to Fragrant Hearth Mountain to enjoy the moon in the town of Flower Wharf in Baiju Bay, where “I” met the lovely and confident Su, and listened to his interesting stories and sincere love songs, and his sincerity and kindness infected the

wary and timid “me”. Although “I” didn’t enjoy the moon on Fragrant Hearth Mountain this night, the “one-night love” that Su gave to “me” made “me” more brave and fearless. There are also many narratives of daily life in Ye Mi’s novels, for example, in “*Cui Ji Train*”, Lao Cui and his wife Qiu Yuan are doing sewing and mending business at the entrance of the alley every day, and there is endless work to be done, “Except for meals, they sit on the small stools from morning to night, burying their heads in sewing and mending the clothes of the customers, just like the two stones by the water’s edge. like this, hard, tedious, yet normal” (Ye, 2012); in “*Little Women*”, Fengmao lives a troubled and difficult life, running around all day long to make ends meet and toiling over trifles, she lives her days carefully, looking for a job does not go well, and she has no capital to open a store.

Throughout Ye Mi’s creations, she never tries her best to arrange and publicize big characters and big scenes, she sublimates the trivial daily life into the spiritual expression of literary works, observes literary creations with simple humanistic feelings, and writes about the alienation and warmth of human nature under the trend of the times.

4. The Internal Causes of the Writing of Human Nature in Fragrant Hearth Mountain

4.1 Driven by Literary Outlook

Ye Mi adheres to the concept of serious literary creation, consciously avoids the temptation and constraints of social trends and economic interests, and insists on writing short stories; at the same time, the image of those distinctive minor characters, in contrast to the current social environment of materialistic desires, implies the writer’s deep hope for human nature; as a writer with a deep sense of responsibility for literature, it has become the literary ideal to watch over the return of human nature and the restoration of the spiritual home of mankind. As a writer with a deep sense of literary responsibility, it has become Ye Mi’s literary ideal to watch over the return of human nature and the restoration of the spiritual home of mankind.

“Writers must hold a constant position of value when controlling their characters, and writing about humanity in capital letters is the iron law that all writers in this world must follow; only then does your character have the soul that you have given him or her” (Ding, 2024). Ye Mi has always adhered to the tradition of “human literature”, reflecting the hotspots of China’s social transformation with a keen sense of smell, examining in depth the spiritual state of modern people, and revealing in the depths of her texts her observation and reflection on human nature. Out of this literary outlook, Ye Mi adopts a rational and calm way of writing in *Fragrant Furnace Mountain*, dissecting the human nature hidden in the minutest details of life, such as the villagers of Flower Wharf who do not know the whole picture of the matter and “condemn” the victim with the word “deserved”, the middle-aged woman who refuses to take the way without immediate return, and the middle-aged woman who refuses to take the way without immediate return. The middle-aged woman refuses to lead the way without immediate reward. These episodes show the evil and darkness of human nature in front of the readers, and this evil of

human nature does not resemble the blood of Yu Hua's writing, but is revealed under the surface of daily life. However, criticizing the ugliness of human nature is not the purpose of Ye Mi's creation, she constructs another beautiful literary geographical world with warm strokes. In the town of Flower Wharf and Bai Ju Wan, which is a paradise in the world, there are kind and simple people like Su, Granny Xia, and Sister Yan, which shows the writer's desire to rebuild human trust, and implies the author's expectation of the warmth and beauty of human nature.

4.2 Call for Human Warmth

In Yemi's view of creation, feelings are an essential factor: "In my view of life, the relationship between a person and the world is the relationship between feelings and emotions. In the world, feelings are the payment and the greatest exercise. People need exercise. ... a work, feelings are its body heat" (Zhang & Fan, 2011). Undoubtedly, Ye Mi is a real writer with self-awareness, and her works are full of understanding of the hardships and complexities of growing up, revelation of the universal existential dilemmas of human beings, reflection on history and the times, scrutinizing power and politics, and calling for the moral return of human nature. Whether she is writing about family, friendship or love, she always calls for warmth.

Despite the negative energy in "*Fragrant Hearth Mountain*", the main character "I" still chooses to trust and tolerate, believing in the goodness of human nature, which also reflects the writer Yemi's concern for the real world. The butterfly wings lying on the side of the road make "I" feel compassionate, and "I" worry that the mutilated butterfly wings will be trampled on by people, so "I" decide to dig a small pit to bury them. "The person who tore off the butterfly's wings was afraid of the same mentality: he didn't intend to kill the butterfly, but only for the momentary pleasure. What kind of person would seek that kind of pain? Hopefully not a child!" (Ye, 2014) When the madman read the word "cannibalism" through the cracks of the text, his first thought was "Save the child...", and he hesitated to think that there might not be a child in the world who hadn't eaten a human being, but the protagonist had no intention of killing the butterfly. He hesitates to think that there may not be any child in the world who has not eaten a human being, but the main character "I" is psychologically unwilling to believe that the butterfly died from human brutality, and has already won over the maniac. Out of his call for human warmth, Yemi skillfully arranges the chance encounter between "I" and Su in the dusk before nightfall. With the deepening of the night, "my" trip to enjoy the moon on Fragrant Hearth Mountain also unfolds. In the process of advancing physical time, "my" attitude toward Su undergoes a great change, and the burden of the mind caused by the murder case over the past six months gradually disappears with the dawn. Here, the protagonist successfully completes the healing of human trauma and self-return, and although he misses an opportunity to enjoy pleasure, he gains more, "I know that after this night, I will drive away cowardice and be as fearless as I was before" (Ye, 2014), and it also becomes clearer that the healing of human trauma also depends on the release of human kindness and warmth.

Secondly, the use of the imagery of “ears of rice” and “wild chrysanthemums” is particularly outstanding. As the trip to enjoy the moon deepens, “my” attitude toward the strange young man Su gradually changes, from initial hostility and mistrust, to later observation, and finally to envy and respect. Su handed “me” large and heavy ears of rice, and the wild chrysanthemums are flourishing, and when they are placed in the hand, they will unfold into a large bunch, brilliant and colorful. When they are placed in the hand, they will unfold into a big bunch, brilliant and eye-catching. The ears of rice and the wild chrysanthemums may seem insignificant in everyday life, but in Yemi’s description they are full of hope and texture; a one-pound ear of rice and a single wild chrysanthemum seem to have the feel of a plump cluster of flowers. The ears of rice symbolize the harvest, and the language of wild chrysanthemums is silent and dedicated love, combining two unrelated things together, but achieved a very harmonious effect. The trip to Fragrant Furnace Mountain was very rewarding for “me”, not only did I enjoy the beautiful scenery at night, but also I regained confidence in my future interpersonal relationships from Su; the young man, Su, who had a deep love for “me” through the wild chrysanthemums, was a great help to me. The young man Su, who secretly harbors deep feelings for “me”, conveys his unrequited “devotion” through the wild chrysanthemums, and this silent, dedicated “one-night love”, though short-lived, is enough to make “me” benefit greatly in the future. This silent and devoted “one-night love” is short-lived, but it is enough to benefit “me” for the rest of my life.

5. Conclusion

When we talk about Suzhou literature, it is just like the gentle, delicate and calm life temperament shown by Suzhou people hidden in the alleys, which is not noisy and never aims at eye-catching creation. Compared with other regional literature, there is less of the “strong” posture of regional literature, and more of the small scenes of streets and alleys and the smoke of the floating world, which exist in a kind of calm and peaceful literary posture. Contemporary Suzhou literature has witnessed the historical process and changes of the city. With the advancement of urban construction, the geographical map of Suzhou has been constantly redefined and reshaped in the process, and the increasingly obvious urban-rural differences are highlighted by the alienation of human nature in the real life, which tries to challenge the speed of development of this ancient city. Suzhou literature, famous for its “alley literature”, has been carried on to the present day, reflecting the daily chores and trivial lives of mortals in the alleys and lanes in various periods of history, and it is gratifying to note that literature has never ceased to pay attention to human nature and the individual.

Ye Mi draws nutrition and inspiration from the gentle literature of Suzhou, and boldly writes about the difficulties and pains experienced by ordinary people against the background of social progress and urban-rural differences. She touches life with the delicate emotions of a woman and finds her own unique writing space in her novels. She is good at seeing through the subtleties of the changing times, penetrating into daily life, focusing on the individual, carefully depicting the growth process and

success or failure of ordinary men and women in the tide of the times, digging out and understanding certain essence or alienation of human nature with a calm writing style, and exploring and revealing it at a deeper level.

With the perseverance and courage of keeping the clouds open and seeing the moon, Ye Mi tries to let the individual spiritual temperament get rid of the shackles of all kinds of dirt and restore the original charm of human nature, in order to achieve his beautiful literary wish of watching over the return of human nature and repairing the broken spiritual home, and further enrich the literary connotation of “alley literature” nowadays.

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